

THE POETICS OF LANGUAGE IN THE MODERN NOVEL: THE ROLE OF METAPHOR AND METONYMY

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ABSTRACT

Analyzing a literary work is analyzing its poetics. Therefore, we should delve deeper in the texture of a literary work to reason on the way language used interlocks to produce artistic devices. Roman Jakobson matches up language patterns to narrative patterns of literature. Language disabilities in aphasic children had likeness to metaphor and metonymy. The poetics of modernist prose is deeply metaphoric but has also elements of metonymy. Even though, structurally opposite, one being vertical and the other horizontal, is observed a close coordination since prose in itself being metonymic. Metonymic technique adjusts to the metaphoric development of a literary work. Simultaneously, even the metonymic development abundantly utilizes metaphor. In a modernist work subsists a connection of experiences based on similarities, avoiding contiguity, since the modernist writer is directed to the cooperation between consciousness and sub consciousness, while the focal point of the realism is the verity of the ideas illustrated.

KEYWORDS: Metaphor, Metonymy, Poetics, Narration, Technique

INTRODUCTION

What is the Poetics of Language?

Literature is based on the artistic usage of the word. While analyzing this characteristic, different researchers stress the force of literature to form the image. According to Hegel, man should be conscientious that “things are not simply what we think they are- that we cannot determine and pin them down according to what we take them to be- but that- in becoming aware that a second look will reveal the cat, the words and my thinking about them to be moving” (Hegel, 1986, p.39) Other researchers, like I.A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), finds the force of literature in the specific language used to express the reality, out of the intention of changing that reality. At the essence of this theory is the language of poetry where “the poetic aim is less important and the linguistic systems gain an independent value.” (Dado, 2006, p.20) In order to analyze a literary work we should analysis its poetics. Thus, we should delve deeper into the way the literary work is constructed, to reason on the technique that melts language to produce artistic units. As indicated by the linguistic Roman Jakobson, poetics was devised between the “the study and theory of literary discourse” (Dado, 2006, p.33) setting in opposition the distinction between poetry and prose. Jakobson adapted the thesis of structuralist linguistics to narrative syntax and literary theory. This is the reason why his poetics is indissoluble from linguistics.

Even though different researchers have unlike perspectives on poetics, they agree on its general aim which focuses on “the study of the fulfillment of artistic content in the form used and in the complex dialectics of relations from the highest to the deepest level of content” (Dado, 2006, p.37) This poetic considers the literary work as a system with its specific internal laws that changes from other literary works depending on literary genre, subject and message given to the audience. This message arrives to be part of the system only when it transmits artistic value, which is made possible

through the collaboration with its specific elements. This definition of poetics avoids the primary function of the message: that of informing. That is the reason why it is created a biome connection between the message transmitted by a literary work and the system of that work, without avoiding, but fulfilling one another.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jacobson Theory on the Poetics of a Literary Work

Like literature, even language is a system with its internal laws. These laws cooperate within the system of language itself, but even collaborate with other systems out of the language. This is the reason why Roman Jakobson put in parallelism syntax structures with the narrative structures of literature. While studying the language disorders of aphasic children, in his paper ‘Two Aspects of language and two Types of Aphasics Disturbances’, he found out that these children showed disorders of similarity, the impossibility to substitute one similar element to another. Children with disability of proximity did not have the capacity to combine contiguous elements in a chronological order. These language disabilities in aphasic children showed to be similar to the figures of metaphor and metonymy.

Metaphor is a literary figure that compares objects instead of just naming them. It does not suggest the words, but expresses their meaning by other words of substitution. Metonymy uses a word to name a whole standing for a part, making possible for a name or an object to represent a name or another object. Jakobson did not use metaphor and metonymy as just literary figures, but as penetrating intensity organizing the syntax system. When the attention of a literary work is on the message then this message has a poetic function. Jakobson was of the ideas that the syntactic function of the message in a literary work has two opposing processes acting at the same time within the message. The first process is converged on syntactic relations within the context of contiguity associations. This metonymic process is horizontal rooted in events that follow one another consequently through a cause –effect interaction. The second process is converged on syntactic relations through similarity, equivalency and contrast of choosing similar variations. In consequence, this metaphoric process is vertical rooted in simultaneity.

As maintained by Jakobson, “in a normal verbal behavior both processes are continually operative, but... under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality and verbal style, preferences is given to one of the two processes over the other”. (Jakobson, 1956, p.55-82) As a result, whatever message is tempted to be built either on the relations of similarity or of contiguity, and influenced by the system of Jakobson, is tempted to be named as a metonymic or metaphoric syntactic organization. If these syntactic structures are parallelized with literary narrative structures, Jakobson came to the conclusion that prose, because of the relations of contiguity is metonymic, while poetry, because of the relations of similarity and metrical structures is metaphoric. Following the same line of reasoning, the traditional novel is metonymic because the realistic author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. (Jakobson, 1956, p.60) These movements are horizontal following a chronological arrangement of events in the novel. The chronological arrangement is directed toward time and built upon the straight cause-effect presentation of events narrated. On the contrary, if the metaphoric relation is built not on chronological display but on vertical movements in time and space, we are predisposed, always based on Jakobson theory, to find these elements in the modern novel. Modernist writers neglected the plot and the presentations of events in sequential time from the omniscient narrator. In contrast, the modernist writer uses various viewpoints or a narrow viewpoint of the story, moving within the time period of action.

New poetic devices such as mythical archetypes and word repetition, expressed through symbols and images, which through their frequency express the artistic viewpoint of the writer, replace the poetic configuration of the traditional novel. Avoiding an external presentation of happenings and focusing on the action in the psyche of the characters, where the dynamics of the modernist novel is fostered, conveys the intention to scrutinize in the inner side of the characters, in the dark side of the unconscious also in the contrast between the conscious and the unconscious, through which is revealed the heavy psychological conditions of the characters. The plot of the modernist novel does not exhibit a regular pattern of beginning, development and ending. Therefore, the conflict in the center of the novel is open, producing not a closed ending of the events narrated. This plot generates associations, no fluidity of action surpassing a specific reference to time. Artistic events and real events merge into one. The modernist novel causes an inner subtext making room for other associations.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to show how metaphorical and metonymical is the poetics of modernist literature. While reasoning on the function of poetics, I will present a detailed survey of the theory of Roman Jakobson on metaphor and metonymy in literature. Through analyzing the poetics of modernist writers as James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Hemingway, I will be able to present if their poetics fall on which description of Jakobson theory: on the metonymic or metaphoric structure. Based on the results of the analyses of their literary works I will try to provide a final result to this survey focusing on the idea if the modernist novel is based on the metaphorical or metonymical structure.

Research Questions

How metaphorical and metonymical is the poetics of modernist writers as James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and Hemingway?

RESULTS

The Poetics of Gertrude Stein

While explaining her style of writing, Gertrude Stein says that, "When I first began writing, I felt that writing should go on, I still do feel that it should go on but when I first began writing I was completely possessed by the necessity that writing should go on and if writing should go on what had colons and semi-colons to do with it, what had commas to do with it." (Stein, 1971, p.76) Stein believed that prose was based on horizontal presentations of events, which followed one another through a precise time sequence by similarity. This writing technique is similar to similarity disorders in Jakobson theory where is seen the intricacy to substitute a similar element to another because of the impossibility to name objects with their proper names, but just on their usage. This metonymic structure makes syntactic relations on the word usage and also builds a context where the action has contiguity. *The Making of Americans* (1906-8) is a novel written in the metonymic structure. The action follows the elements of contiguity such as:

It happens very often that a man has it in him, that a man does something, that he does it very often that he does many things, when he is a young man when he is an old man, when he is an older man. One of such of these kind of them had a little boy and this one, the little boy wanted to make a collection of Butterflies and beetles and it was all exciting to him and it was all arranged then and then the father said to the son you are certain that this is not a cruel thing.....

In the second part of her creativity, with the novel *Tender Buttons* (1921), a more radical part of her literary style and poetics is perceived together with a change in her method of writing. For the poetics of this writing period she says that it is like: “looking at anything until something that was not the name of that thing but was in a way the actual thing would come to be written” (Stein, 1971, p. 86) The manner of transmitting the message in this second period changes completely because now she is focused on similarity and substitution, not on contiguity, while making the context. Her poetics now is vertical, according to the structure of Jakobson, and permits the option of similar variations. She is not anymore interested in syntactical relations within the message making the sentences appear as set of words. In her volume *Tender Buttons* (1911), which is more radical in style than *The Making of Americans*, she expresses herself through a line of metaphors as:

Apple, plum, carpet steak, seed clam, coloured wine, calm see, best shake, potato, potato and no gold work with pet, a green seen is called bake and changes sweet is bready, a little piece a little piece please.

Her metaphorical message surfs in space because she: “had to feel anything and everything that for me was existing so intensively that I could put it down in writing as a thing in itself without at all necessarily using its name” (Stein, 1971, p.100) Such poetics altered time to space, action to motionless while catching the emotional condition in the consciousness and unconscious of the writer and characters in a specific moment of time. Even though Joyce in his *Finnegans Wake*, Beckett in his *Quad* (1967) and other modernist writers extended their poetics to the limits of metaphorical representation, they still kept logic of contiguity and metonymic structure in word order.

The Poetics of Joyce

While analyzing the poetics of James Joyce, in *Ulysses* (1922), is immediately noticed the heavy usage of stream of consciousness technique. The stream expresses the feelings and thoughts of Stephen and Bloom through the usage of metaphors on similarity and proximity. The metaphor of *Ulysses* is based on the proximity of the city of Dublin and the travel of *Odyssey*, without avoiding even other proximities in the whole book. The proximity of a telephone cable generates in the mind of Stephen ideas related to his naissance and that of the whole humanity. Even the cord used in the clothing of monks produces similarity to the purity of the body of Christ. In the episode of *Proteus* Stephen says:

A misbirth with a trailing navelcord, hushed in ruddy wool. The cords of all link back, strandent winning cable of all flesh. That is why mystic monks. Will you be as gods? Gaze in your omphalos. Hello. Kinch here. Put me on the Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one.

Spouse and helpmate of Adam Kadmon: Heva, naked Eve.

The monologues of Stephen are more metaphorical than those of Bloom, which are more metonymical. While watching the servant girl at the butcher's, Bloom develops metonymic relations in his discourse. His description examines her dressing and physical posture such as her vital hips, muscular arms and male hands. In his mind starts an association related to the image of the girl based on metonymic relations. In the psyche of Bloom the girl causes a chain of metonymic thinking where he initiates imagining the girl's master, the girlfriend of the master and the age of the master's girlfriend, which is the same to the age of the girl in the shop. The stream of his Psyche, make Bloom say:

He stood by the nextdoor girl at the counter. Would she buy it too, calling the items from a slip in her hand. Chapped: washing soda. And a pound and a half of Denny's sausages. His eyes rested on her vigorous hips. Woods his name is. Wife is oldish. New blood. No followers allowed. Strong pair of arms. Whacking a carpet on the clothes line.

She does whack it, by George. The way her crooked skirt swings at each whack.

Contrary to the previous paragraph, in the one following, is seen a discourse on the metaphorical level. Bloom extends his thinking by expressing that: the ferretheaded porkbutcher folded the sausages he had snipped off with bloody fingers, sausage pink. Sound meat there like a stalled heifer.

The metaphoric structure of Stephen is not of the same level as that of Bloom because they are related to their specific context. In the case of Bloom every metaphor is part of the context in the butcher's shop.

The narrative structure of *Ulysses* presents elements of metaphor based on similarity, but even elements of metonymy. The primary intensity in the advance of narration shows to be the memory of characters supplied by conjoins of similar experiences. Through the consciousness of Bloom is widespread the metonymic structure of the novel, while through the consciousness of Stephen the metaphoric structure of the novel. Interesting to note is that the modernist novel is typified by a metaphorical structure, serving as its characteristic and differentiating from the traditional novel, but also a metonymic structure, as a distinctive feature of every prose writing. But as Jakobson observes, the metaphorical structure prevails.

The Poetics of Hemingway

In Hemingway, is clearly perceived an association between metaphoric and metonymic structure. Even the metonymic structure serves the metaphoric one. In the majority of his stories, the line of narration is acquired through contiguity and the description of characters, the setting, time and space. Over this metonymic structure is developed the metaphorical one. A mechanism of repetition is put into function through the procedure of repeating key words born out of associations with metaphorical meaning. In *Another Country* (1927), the repetition of key words as 'cold' and 'fall' enacts a series of metaphorical associations implying death and destruction. The story says:

In the fall the war was always there, but we did not go to in anymore. It was cold in the fall in Milan and the dark came very early. Then the electric lights came on, and it was pleasant along the streets looking in the windows. There was much game hanging outside the shops and the snow powered in the fur of the foxes and the wind blew their tails... It was cold and the wind came down from the mountains.

At first sight, the descriptive parts are built on contiguity relations. The city of Milan is described through its shops, the game shops, certain animals and their bodies. Specific grammatical structures and repetitive key words are used intentionally to attract the focus on similarities enacting a set of associations between the emotional feelings of the soldiers and the weather in the city. That is the reason why the poetics of Hemingway varies from the traditional metonymic structure of the message to the metaphorical associations of the modernist literature.

CONCLUSIONS

In an article on Marcel Proust, Genette explains that "without metaphor, Proust says, more or less, no true memories: we add for him and for all; without metonymy, no linking of memories, no story, no novel" (Genette, 1970, 156-70) As a conclusion, I can say that the poetic of modernism was deeply produced through a metaphorical structure, but even through a metonymical one. Even though these structures were of different perspectives, one vertical and the other horizontal, it was perceived collaboration between the two as a result of the fact that prose is in itself metonymic. Consequently the metonymic structure adjusted to the metaphorical structure of a literary work. It was

also understood that the metonymic structure made use of the metaphoric one. In a modernist fiction existed cooperation between experiences on similarity, avoiding contiguity, since the modernist writer was directed to the cooperation between consciousness and unconsciousness, while the traditional writer was directed to the truth of ideas presented. For the modernist writers nothing was what is seen, everything had a double meaning.

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